

# Revitalization of Seattle waterfront takes shape after more than a decade of construction

*Marc Stiles*

10-12 minutes

---

## **‘Our new front porch’**

It’s been a long slog for businesses along the waterfront, and the disruptions continue.

The teardown of the viaduct was followed by the pandemic’s economic wallop and now a labyrinth of construction along the waterfront.

Jackhammering crews recently worked outside artist [Burgandy Viscosi](#)’s tiny gallery tucked behind the Starbucks on Pier 55. At a certain angle, the noise comes into the gallery and bounces off the walls.

“It’s uncomfortable for me and I know it’s uncomfortable for (my) visitors,” said Viscosi, who recently had to close the doors “for quite a few days in a row which deterred a bit of business.”

The gallery has been open a little over a year, and according to Viscosi, saw an annual sales jump of 17% for the three months that ended in September.

Viscosi said that based on what she and other business owners are hearing at monthly briefings by the project team and city officials, the project will start to feel almost done in as soon as a year and a half.

Artist Burgandy Viscosi is the owner of the Burgandy Viscosi Gallery located on Pier 54.

Anthony Bolante | PSBJ

“Right now, (construction is) moving along pretty well,” she said.

Portions of the park, like Pier 62, are done. Alaskan Way is being shifted from the shoreline to the east side of the waterfront at the base of the steep hillside. The new Alaskan Way plus a new street, Elliott Way, which will connect the waterfront to Belltown, are to open in February, the project team said.

The rerouting of Alaskan allows construction of the promenade and protected bicycle lanes.

Last year, members of the Historic Waterfront Association tallied 4.3 million visitors, and the area is expected to hit 5 million visitors this year, according to association leader and Ivar’s President [Bob Donegan](#).

Bob Donegan is the president of Ivar’s, pictured here in front of the Ivar’s Acres of Clams flagship restaurant on Pier 54.

Anthony Bolante | PSBJ

When the park opens in 2025, the number of annual visitors could reach 20 million, according to project consultant HR&A Advisors.

“It will be our new front porch,” said [Joy Shigaki](#), a fourth-generation Seattleite and the new president and CEO of Friends of

Waterfront Seattle, the city's nonprofit philanthropic partner on the waterfront redevelopment.

[Ben Dougherty](#), longtime owner-operator of the Zig Zag Café overlooking Elliott Bay, said last quarter was his busiest ever. It's not entirely due to the waterfront, he said, noting for instance that a competitor, Lecosho, closed. "It was a great place."

But the fact the waterfront "is becoming a thing" helps, he said. "People are starting to see it manifest."

Zig Zag Cafe owner Ben Dougherty runs one of the businesses along the Seattle waterfront that have been impacted by years of construction.

Anthony Bolante | PSBJ

Most people come to the windblown waterfront from June through September. This means that if the big crowds materialize as forecast, the waterfront could see 87,800 people a day in summer, up from 27,600 currently, Donegan said.

### **'Get them up in the air'**

On a recent Sunday morning, four colleagues from Alexandria, Virginia, in town for a national insurance and securities licensing conference, were stymied trying to get from the market to the water.

"We just got here. We don't know how to get anywhere right now," Richard Tozer said.

They thought they could reach the water via Victor Steinbrueck Park "but then we saw this big fence," said one of Tozer's peers. "We didn't see any opening."

Rising at the foot of Pike Place Market, a \$70 million project called Overlook Walk is key to accommodating the crowds, and will be the linchpin of the new waterfront.

Overlook Walk is a bridge over Alaskan Way with sloping, landscaped paths. It finally fulfills the decades-long desire for an obvious, easily accessible way to the waterfront.

“We didn’t want those 90,000 people crossing at grade. Get them up in the air and get them out of the way. It’s safer,” Donegan said.

When completed in 2025, Overlook Walk will have a sloping pedestrian path leading from Pike Place Market to Seattle's waterfront.

Waterfront Seattle rendering

When it opens in 2025, Overlook Walk will complement the Pike Place Street Hill Climb, the tucked-out-of-the-way, stepped connection that passes by Dougherty’s Zig Zag Cafe and other businesses.

Overlook Walk is going up next to other key projects: the Seattle Aquarium’s long-planned, \$160 million Ocean Pavilion, and the relocation of Alaskan Way plus the new two-way street, Elliott Way.

Ocean Pavilion is a small but complex building — just 48,000 square feet but with 4 million pounds of rebar, or more than what goes into a typical downtown high-rise, according to [Stuart Kibbee](#) of Turner Construction Co., the project general contractor.

A quarter of the rebar is for a tank that will have walls at least 2 feet thick, with the rest for the building base mat foundation.

“I have been in the construction business for over 30 years and the construction of the concrete tank and the overall building is the

most complex project I have worked on in my career,” he wrote in an email.

This is a rendering of the Seattle Aquarium project as construction continues at Pier 59.

Courtesy Seattle Aquarium

All this is in addition to other ongoing Waterfront Park projects as well as significant amounts of private development including new apartment and office buildings.

“There aren’t many projects of this scale because it’s really billions of dollars,” said [Bob Davidson](#), longtime president and CEO of the aquarium, which is owned by the city but operated by the nonprofit aquarium society.

Scheduled to open in the summer of 2024, Ocean Pavilion is the biggest thing to happen at the aquarium since its founding 45 years ago. The conservation and education facility will anchor what the society says will be the “world’s first climate-positive aquarium campus” with fossil-fuel-free operations.

Of the project’s \$160 million budget, half are public dollars with the rest coming from private donors. As of last month, \$53.3 million of the private funds had been raised.

Bob Davidson, the president and CEO of Seattle Aquarium, has overseen the aquarium for two decades.

Anthony Bolante | PSBJ

## **Help for the homeless**

Throughout the planning of the park, questions about Seattle’s homelessness crisis have loomed. Homelessness, in general,

remains the top concern of Seattleites, according to a recent Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce-commissioned survey of registered voters.

Unhoused people are not as visible on the waterfront compared to the central business district, due in part to the work of Friends of Waterfront Seattle, which is responsible for helping fund, build and program Waterfront Park.

Friends has contracted with Evergreen Treatment Services' Reach program, which deploys outreach workers who try to build trust with unsheltered people and eventually move them off the streets and into housing.

Joy Shigaki became president and CEO of Friends of Waterfront Seattle in September 2022.

Joshua Lewis photo

Under the contract with Friends, Reach assigns two social workers in and around the revitalized waterfront. They work 40 hours a week, plus some overtime for nights and weekends, distributing survival supplies. A nurse offers on-site care, and the outreach workers will take people to the emergency room.

Reach also conducts deescalation trainings for businesses and residents and distributes NARCAN to them and unsheltered people, showing them how to administer the opioid overdose treatment. Reach also refers people to shelters.

“Whether a shelter can take them is another issue,” said Reach’s downtown outreach manager [Mikel Kowalcyk](#). On Oct. 20 across 21 shelters and tiny home villages on a city list, there were only nine available beds.

“This is what we’re up against,” Kowalcyk said.

Many more shelter beds are available, but the city does not manage those facilities’ referral processes, which can be overwhelming even for outreach workers to navigate, she added.

Reach is working to increase the annual contract with Friends from \$100,000 to \$240,000 to support two outreach workers, Reach Director Chloe Gale said.

As she wound down the summer season, Viscosi, the artist and gallery owner, said she would like to see more locals come to the waterfront in the winter.

Shigaki expects Friends’ programming will be minimal, with the group highlighting events at the market and in Pioneer Square.

“(The waterfront) is not necessarily a winter destination but in reality, all of Seattle is wet and wintry,” Viscosi said. “At the waterfront at least you get a view.”





See the transformation of the Seattle waterfront as construction continues a few years after the demolition of the Alaska Way Viaduct. Photos by Anthony Bolante | PSBJ

### **‘Holy wow’**

Seven years ago, activists were pushing for a 45-foot-wide, elevated “garden bridge” running along the waterfront from Pike Place Market to Lumen Field. This unsettled [James Corner](#), the landscape architect for Waterfront Park.

He called the plan, which city voters ultimately rejected, “a very silly” and “dumb idea,” and added that while the views would be “spectacular” they would come at a huge cost. Like the viaduct, the garden bridge would cast shadows on the waterfront.

Corner said people would be awestruck when the viaduct was demolished.

He was right.

[Berni Bo](#), a retired musician who lived in Seattle years ago and now resides near Sequim, was visiting the waterfront on a Saturday in September. She came to ride the Great Wheel and attend a show after dinner at Ivar’s.

“The viaduct being gone was like holy wow,” Bo said. “It’s absolutely amazing. Now the viaduct’s gone and (the waterfront) is



just an extension of Seattle.”

## **Health Care Leadership Awards**

This winter, PSBJ will host its annual Health Care Leadership Awards, a celebration of the outstanding leaders in health care around the Puget Sound area.

Register now

## **2023 40 Under 40 Award**

Nominate a business leader under the age of 40 who is making an impact in business, philanthropy, and in their communities. Shine the light on rising business leaders today. Nominee must be 39 years of age or younger through April 30, 2023

Submit a Nomination

## **Related Content**